

HAMPTON

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Crossroads Project Update

Last week the Hampton City Council received a report from City staff outlining the design and financing structure for the Crossroads Project. Following are some common questions that citizens may have about the project.

What is the benefit of having a convention center in our city?

Convention delegates bring significant amounts of new "clean money" into the local economy. This means that they generate sales taxes, meals taxes, and lodging taxes, but do not require the same degree of services as residents do for schools, police and fire services, etc.

A 1994 Strategic Economic Development Plan for Hampton noted that Virginia is underserved by modern convention facilities. The studies took into account that another city in the region could also host a convention center.

Why have the costs for the project changed?

In the initial planning in 2000, the costs to build a convention center and infrastructure were identified as \$76 million. These were based on national averages for projects of this type, and not on a specific design. In 2002, with an actual schematic design, the final costs have been identified as \$90 million.

The new costs are the result of further research that has identified ways to make the convention center even more competitive and attractive to meeting planners and conventioners. The building costs went from \$64 million to \$69 million. These include an actual physical connection between the convention center and the headquarters hotel; more flexibility in the design of the exhibit halls; more loading docks for ease of setting up exhibits; secure meeting spaces; a business center for faxing, shipping materials, etc.; state-of-the-art computer capabilities; and the ability to easily expand in the future.

The site costs went from \$12 million to \$21 million. This includes an improved traffic flow on the site; positioning the private development in an area that will be more accessible, and visible from the Interstate; and enhanced public open space, which is important to conventioners as well as the general Hampton public. The only remaining cost uncertainty is the impact of the State shortfall in funding state and local transportation projects.

Have we studied the risks vs. the potential rewards for this project?

In its economic planning, the city has studied all possibilities, including "worst case" scenarios. The 2 percent meals and lodging tax established in 2000, in conjunction with a debt service reserve, will create a "rainy day fund" that will further protect taxpayers' investment. Because of such a buffer, as well as the continued revenues from the meals and lodging tax, the revenues from the Crossroads Project could drop by as much as 88 percent of projections over the entire 30-year loan — and the city's General Fund would remain untouched.

It's anticipated the project will bring significant new revenues to Hampton.



We want to hear from you!

Let us know what you think about City Page. Call us at 727-6893, or e-mail pubcomm@hampton.gov.

We'd like to hear from you soon!

Rail transit open house

Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) invites you to a public open house meeting regarding the proposed Peninsula Rail Transit project. The purpose of this meeting is to receive comments and questions about the proposed Peninsula Rail Transit project. HRT will display maps, discuss the proposed alignments and review the study process.

Your opinion counts. Plan to attend the meeting on: March 21 at Hampton High School, 1491 W. Queen Street.

Additional meetings are set for March 19 and 20 at other Peninsula locations. Each meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. and end at 8:30 p.m.

For questions or additional information, please contact HRT Community Relations, 222-6021. Visit HRT's Web site at www.hrtransit.org.



In celebration of Black History Month, Spiritual Jubilation - Dramatic Gospel Presentation, was presented last

month at The American Theatre. The performances featured Washington, D.C. female gospel sensation J.E.W.E.L. For information on upcoming performances at the theatre, call 722-ARTS, or visit www.hampton.gov/arts.

Porcelain needed for oyster reefs



Hampton Watershed Restoration is collecting porcelain for Virginia Marine Resources Commission to be used in a Back River oyster reef. It's a substitute for shell which is hard to come by. About 33 trailer loads are needed as well as volunteers like Lee Boone and Roger Stronach, to break out all non-porcelain material. Plumbers, businesses and others with porcelain toilets and sinks can bring these at no charge to Hampton's Bethel Landfill, 100 N. Park Lane. In four years, Hampton volunteers have grown 87,000 oysters to help reduce water pollution. For information on this and other stewardship projects, please call 727-6325.

Calendar

MARCH 11 Neighborhood Commission

Regular meeting, 6 p.m., Kenneth Wallace Neighborhood Resource Center, 2315 Victoria Boulevard, 727-6460, www.hamptonvaneighborhoods.org.



Planning Commission

Regular meeting, 3:30 p.m., Council Chambers, City Hall, 727-6140.

MARCH 13 City Council

Regular meeting, 7:30 p.m., Council Chambers, City Hall, 727-6315. Agendas on Web site: hampton.gov/council. Meetings broadcast live; re-broadcasts March 14 at 10 a.m., and March 16 at 3 p.m. on The City Channel TV-47.

MARCH 14

Citizens' Unity Commission

Regular meeting, 6:30 p.m., Unity Room, Carmel Center, 136 Kings Way, 727-1379, unity@hampton.gov.

MARCH 18 Youth Commission

Regular meeting, 7 p.m., Council Chambers, City Hall, 728-3285, e-mail youthcom@hampton.gov

MARCH 19

National Acrobats of China

Don't miss this stunningly athletic show in the Hampton Coliseum. This company of 45 delights audiences of all ages in the breathtaking and daredevil acrobatic stunts. 7:30 p.m., Hampton Coliseum, 722-2787.

MARCH 20

School Board

Regular meeting, 7:30 p.m., Forum at Jones Magnet Middle School, 1819 Nickerson Blvd., 896-8107.

MARCH 20 - 24

Mahalia - A Gospel Musical

Get to know the world's greatest gospel singer- follow her from her poor beginnings as the grandchild of plantation slaves to her international fame and work with Martin Luther King, Jr. The American Theatre, 8 p.m., 722-ARTS, www.hampton.gov/arts.



Gayle Avila



Opening the book on diversity

Do you enjoy reading and talking? Substitute teacher Gayle Avila does and says those are the reasons she decided to attend the Citizens' Unity Commission's book discussion group for the first time last month. Avila was welcomed warmly by the group and found herself quickly caught up in discussion of the current read, "Walking Across Egypt" by Clyde Edgerton. "Opening the Book on Diversity" meets the second Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Unity Room of the Carmel Center for Justice and is open to anyone who enjoys reading and lively discussions about cultural and racial diversity.

Facilitator Loretta Milam says the purpose of the group is to read books by a variety of authors about diverse cultures and to talk about them.

"We use our discussions to look at our own opinions and experiences concerning race relations," says Milam. "We learn about other cultures and discuss their similarities to and differences from our own, and we talk about how people relate to one another."

The members choose which books they will read, and Milam says they have read "at least 36" in the three years since the discussion group began meeting. The next is "Arranged Marriage" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

By the way, Avila says she learned about the book discussion group from an e-mail message headed "Things To Do" which she received from Hampton's eNews program. You can sign up for Things To Do messages and lots more by going to www.eneews.hampton.gov.

The next Opening the Book on Diversity meeting will be March 12. For details, call 727-1379.



Want to save time AND be able to keep up with city information? Sign up for Hampton eNews at www.eneews.hampton.gov.

Hampton eNews offers subscribers the choice of nine topics -- everything from things to do to neighborhoods. The brief e-mails are free and are at your fingertips.

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Regional reading event

Australian author Mem Fox will share her passion for helping young children develop literacy skills with a presentation at 2 p.m. Sunday, March 10 at the Gaines Theater at Christopher Newport University. The lecture is free and open to the public.

A long-time teacher as well as a best-selling author, Fox is passionate about the role that reading aloud plays in helping children develop literacy skills. She stresses that parents should begin reading aloud as soon as the child is born, and her latest book, "Reading Magic," is filled with advice for both parents and teachers to help them make reading aloud fun and effective.

The award-winning author travels extensively as an international literacy consultant.



She has written more than 25 picture books for children, including "Possum Magic" and "Time for Bed."

Fox has written several adult books, including "Reading Magic" and "Radical Reflections: Passionate Opinions on Teaching Learning and Living."

Square One, a regional non-profit that supports school readiness, is sponsoring the lecture with the Library of Virginia, Friends of the Hampton Public Library, Friends of the Norfolk Public Library, Friends of the Virginia Beach Public Library, Friends of the Williamsburg Regional Library, and Friends of the York County Public Library.

Questions? Please call 552-0293, or visit the Square One Web site: www.SqOne.org.

Ask 311!

Q. Why not take the money that you would use to build the Crossroads Project and use it for other purposes such as building schools or making street repairs?

A. To do those kinds of projects, the city borrows money through the issuance of general obligation bonds. This means that the cost to pay back those loans is covered by taxes paid by city residents and businesses. If there are not sufficient funds in the city budget, it could mean that the city would have to either curtail other services or raise taxes to pay off such a loan.

In the case of the Crossroads Project, the city will borrow money through the issuance of revenue bonds. This means that the cost to pay back the loan is covered exclusively by the revenue generated by the project - that is, the sales, meals and lodging taxes that accrue from new visitors coming to our city to spend money. (The 2 percent meals and lodging tax established in 2000 also contributes to this). There are no other direct costs to taxpayers.

The Crossroads Project is designed to generate significant additional funds beyond the repayment of the loan. Those funds could be used for city services or other initiatives. The financing for Bass Pro Shops would also be accomplished through revenue bonds, thereby avoiding a burden on Hampton tax payers.

Hampton's 311 Customer Call Center will provide answers to frequently asked questions in this column of City Page. To reach the center, dial 3-1-1; on cell phones or outside of Hampton dial 727-8311.



Tune In!

Want to find out about an innovative effort that works to create strong neighborhood schools and promote success for all youth?

Watch Spotlight: IN-SYNC on The City Channel TV-47 at 8:15 a.m. and 8:15 p.m. daily.

